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# **THE HINDU RECEPTION OF CHRIST**

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Edited by  
**Sebastian Painadath**

# **JEEVADHARA**

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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## **The Hindu Reception of Christ**

**Edited by**

**Sebastian Painadath**

Jeevadhara

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## Editorial

'With devotion we let Christ into our life, but not the Christ of Christianity'—this we often hear from our Hindu sisters and brothers. This is a challenge to us Christians to get in touch with the deeper significance of Christ and to look critically at the ways we have been 'proclaiming' Christ in India. For a Hindu to meet Christ 'in the cave of heart' means to be gripped by the divine Spirit (*Atman*); and the Spirit can act only through a spiritually transparent medium. Much of the dogmatic definitions and ritual prescriptions with which Christianity as a religion adorned Christ over the centuries makes the Christ image opaque: they are a block to the Hindu seeker from discovering the original face of Jesus.

Hence it is important that we Christians listen to the Hindus: what answers do they give to the perennial question, *who do you say I am?* No christology has given an all-time valid answer to this; no dogma can exhaust the 'height and depth, length and breadth' of the mystery of God's love revealed in Christ. With our Hindu seekers we are on a spiritual pilgrimage in pursuit of grasping the mystery of Christ. What they share with us from within the depth of their Christ-experience inspires us and enlightens us in our faith in Christ.'

A small attempt to listen to the Hindu friends is made in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. In the first chapter we listen to some sages of the recent Indian Renaissance. In the subsequent chapters several Hindu friends—sannyasins and house-holders, social workers and professors, young and old – try to articulate what Christ means to them. There is an amazing diversity of perceptions: some understand Christ as a spiritual *guru*, others as an ethical teacher; some discover in him the *Bhagavan*, others the *Ista Deva*; for some Christ is a *Jeevanmukta*, for others a true *Yogin* in the full sense of the term. Some worship him as the Incarnate Son of God and others consider him as the Redeemer

from the ocean of *samsara*. Some feel through him the gracious touch of God's love in their lives and others find in him the compassionate face of God turned towards humanity.

To many Hindus Christ comes through the Gospels, to many others through the inspiring life and commitment of some Christians. Hardly anyone has been impressed by the formal preaching of the Christian missionaries. In fact the Hindu friends are very critical of the language and style of the so-called 'direct evangelisation'. They are suspicious of the 'conversion drive' of some Christian agencies and are offended by the exclusivist language of Christian theology. With the background of the ascetical and mystical traditions of India they say that *Christian* communities in India should project the true image of Christ through their simplicity of life, contemplative pursuits and a genuine insertion into the life of the poor and the marginalised. They find that the colonial hang-ups of a Christian hegemony only betray Christ. Christian presence in India should resonate with India's spiritual heritage and thus truly become *Indian*.

In this issue of *Jeevadhara* we let the Hindus speak about their Christ experience and we listen to them. No attempt is made to offer a theological response. Any such response will be coloured by certain preoccupations of the Western or Orthodox Christian traditions. What is needed today in India is that we explore entirely new ways of understanding the mystery of Christ in our multi-religious and plural-cultural context. In this process the Hindu sages and friends inspire us. 'Evangelisation' is not a one-way traffic; the evangeliser is constantly being evangelised by others; the Hindu friends help us to explore entirely new depths of the mystery of Christ. *Dialogue is the new way of being Church today!*

The last few months have been unfortunately marked by certain tensions on the religious landscape of India. But let it be clear to all of us: the relation between Hindus and Christians in this country continues to be one of harmony and collaboration. This culture of being co-pilgrims has to shape our neighbourly relations. These pages which portray the Hindu reception of Christ could be a theological contribution to the promotion of this culture of dialogue.

S. Painadath



# The Understanding of Christ in the Indian Renaissance

Sebastian Painadath

India in the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed not only a political transition but a religious renaissance too. The dominant Hindu community became aware of its unique significance on the global landscape of religions and at the same time critical of the social evils poisoning its marrows. A creative dialogue with Christianity made the leaders of Indian renaissance aware of the need of a prophetic critique within Hinduism. At the same time they upheld the need of reawakening the mystical dimension in Christianity. In their understanding of the person and event of Jesus Christ this mystical aspect dominates. The *mystic* in Jesus Christ wakes up in their writings:

## Jesus the Teacher (Ram Mohan Roy)

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) is called the *Prophet of Indian Nationalism* and the *Father of Indian Renaissance*. He was born in a Brahmin family of Bengal. He came in close contact with the spiritual insights of Sufi mysticism in Islam and the social teachings of Protestant Christianity. Thus he was awakened to monotheism and the social dimension of religion. He became very critical about some inhuman practices like *sati* in the Hindu communities and fought against them vehemently. In 1830 he founded Brahmo Samaj to spearhead reform movements in Hinduism and to initiate a process of conscientising the people on the alienations caused by the colonial regime.

Roy could fully accept the ethical teachings of Jesus and he found in them a powerful message of social relevance for India. But he could not agree with the Christological dogmas concerning the salvific event of Christ. It is in his responses to the Protestant theologians of Serampore that Roy articulates his reflections on Jesus Christ.

(These reflections have been collected and published: *Collected English Works of Ram Mohan Roy*, Allahabad, 1906. Quotations below are taken from this edition, as quoted by M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*, Madras, 1976, pp 1-37)

Roy clarifies his basic perspectives on faith in Christ in the following words:

"I regret only that the followers of Jesus, in general, should have paid much greater attention to enquiries after his nature than to the observance of his commandments, when we are well aware that no human acquirements can ever discover the nature even of the most common and visible things and moreover that such enquiries are not enjoined by the divine revelation." (*Op. cit.* 41)

For Roy therefore following the way of Jesus is more important than speculating on the nature of Christ; hence he would always ask, what ethical and socially critical consequences the teachings of Jesus have, and put aside all doctrinal issues related to Trinity and Incarnation, salvation and the Church. For him Jesus is primarily a liberator from the alienation of human existence, and that not through the death and resurrection of Jesus, but through his inspiring teachings on love and forgiveness.

"I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament the moral principles found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding." (*Op. cit.* 483)

"These precepts separated from the mysterious dogmas and historical records appear to the compiler to contain not only



the essence of all that is necessary to instruct mankind in their civil duties, but also the best and only means of obtaining the forgiveness of sins, the favour of God and strength to overcome our passions and to keep his commandments." (*Op cit.* 552)

Adhering to strict monotheism Roy could not accept the divinity of Christ:

"Those who believe God to be supreme, possessing the perfection of all attributes, independently of all other beings, must necessarily deny the identity of Christ with God." (*Op. cit.* 573)

"Jesus spoke of himself throughout all the Scriptures only as the promised Messiah, vested with high glory from the beginning of the world. (John 17:5, 6:24, 9:35-37, 17:1-2, 1:34, 42.) .... And in numerous passages Jesus declares that before he assumed the office of the Messiah in the world, he was entirely subject to and obedient to the Father, from whom he received the commission to come to this world for the salvation of mankind. He tells them: the Father is greater than I (John 14:28). (*Op. cit.* 577)

For Roy the unity of Christ with God is not an identity in *being* but a oneness in will. Christ is not the divine Son that is co-eternal with the divine Father, but the first-born of every creature.

"The epithet Son of God with the definite article prefixed is appropriate to Christ, the first-born of every creature, as a distinct mark of honour which he alone deserves." (*Op. cit.* 577)

"I believe Christ as produced by the Supreme Deity among created beings." (John 5:26, Col. 1:15) (*Op. cit.* 583)

Hence the notion of divine *kenosis* too is unacceptable to Roy. He makes a distinction between Christ 'being in the form of God' and Christ 'being God Himself'. The form does not mean essence, and hence Christ cannot be said to have been pre-existent in identity with the Divine. Roy asks:

"Whether it is not most foreign to the notion of the immutable God, that circumstances could produce such a change in the condition of the Deity, as that he should have not only been divested of his glory for more than thirty years, but even subjected to servitude? Are not such ideas of supreme dominion and that of subjection just as remote as the east from the west?" (*Op. cit.* 803)

What Roy rejects absolutely is the belief in Incarnation. He could not understand how 'the essence of God can be identical with the essence of a servant' (*Op. cit.* 811).

"Is it conformable to the nature of the Supreme Ruler of the universe to take the form of a servant, though for a season?" (*Op. cit.* 172).

The Pauline doctrine of atonement too is unacceptable to Roy. The suffering and death of Jesus is the great manifestation of self-sacrificing love, and we are all called to live that life of love unto death on the cross. But the death of Jesus does not have the soteriological significance that Christianity later attributed to it:

"There is no single passage pronounced by Jesus enjoining a refuge in such a doctrine of the Cross, all-sufficient and indispensable for salvation. Rather in his thinking the blessings of pardon are available from the merciful Father through repentance, which is declared the only means of procuring forgiveness of our failures." (*Op. cit.* 702)

"Would it be consistent with common notions of justice to afflict an innocent man with the death on the Cross for sins committed by others, even supposing the innocent man would voluntarily offer his life in behalf of those others?" (*Op. cit.* 703)

Finally Roy raises a hermeneutic question. He feels that the original liberative message of Jesus has to be liberated from the linguistic and symbolic constraints of the Christian communities of the first century and reinterpreted for people today. Speaking of the language of the New Testament he says:

"These were modes of speech made use of in allusion to the sacrifices and blood-offerings which the Jews and their high priest used to make for the remission of sins; and the apostles wisely accommodated their instructions to the ideas and forms of language familiar to those whom they addressed." (*Op. cit.* 705).

The task today, according to Ram Mohan Roy, is to recover the original meaning of Jesus Christ from its accommodation to categories of the Jewish sacrificial system and translate it 'in a spiritual sense'. (*Op. cit.* 725).

### **Christ, the Manifestation of the Divine, *Cit*** (Keshub Chunder Sen)

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884) born in Calcutta stood under the influence of Christian faith right from his early school days. His relentless search for truth brought him to the Brahma Samaj in 1857. He introduced explicitly Christian values and mystical experiences into the perspectives of the Samaj in view of a culture of spiritual harmony in India. Later he was disappointed by the mentality of the Samaj people and disillusioned by the western version of the traditional Christianity. He initiated a new spiritual movement which he called *the Church of the New Dispensation*. Sen did not get baptised into a denominational Church; for him the Church was a spiritual reality within and beyond religions and denominations. He was deeply transformed by his ardent faith in Christ.

Sen had a well-integrated theological vision. He used to speak of the indwelling Trinity, Father-Son-Spirit, in terms of the Upanishadic categories, *sat-cit-ananda*. The Son of God, the *Cit* of the divine mystery, the *Logos*, eternally existent in the divine womb was born into time and space in Jesus Christ. The man Jesus of Nazareth emptied himself so totally that the divine *Logos* could fully manifest itself in and through him. Hence through faith in Christ one experiences the indwelling presence of the *Logos* within oneself and at the core of the universe, for 'everything has been created in and through the *Logos*'.



This is the basic christological understanding of Sen.

(The following citations from the lectures of K.C. Sen are taken from the anthology: David C. Scott, (ed) *Keshub Chunder Sen*, CLS, Madras, 1979).

For Sen Jesus was not a foreigner, not a product of a foreign religion, but truly an *Asian*. Hence even remaining a Hindu he did not feel alienated from his own religious culture in accepting Christ.

"Why should you go to England to learn about Jesus Christ? Is not his native land nearer to India than England? Recall to your mind the true Asiatic Christ, divested of all western appendages, carrying on the work of redemption among his own people. Behold he comes to us in his loose flowing garment, his dress and features altogether oriental, a perfect Asian in everything. Surely Jesus is *our* Jesus." (201-202)

Sen had a very personal and ardent faith in Christ. He was a true devotee of Jesus. Brought up in the Bengali Vaishnavism he knew what it meant to surrender himself to the personal Lord.

"I am proud that I am an Asian. In fact Christianity was founded and developed by Asians and in Asia. When I recollect on this my love for Jesus becomes hundredfold intensified: I feel him nearer to my heart, and deeper in my national sympathies."  
(64)

"My Christ, my sweet Christ, the brightest jewel of my heart, the necklace of my soul - for twenty years I have cherished him in my miserable heart. Though often defiled and persecuted by the world, I have found sweetness and joy unutterable in my master Jesus. The mighty artillery of his love he levelled against me, and I was vanquished, and I fell at his feet saying: Blessed Child of God, when shall others see the light that is in Thee!"  
(217)

Sen readily accepted the divinity of Christ. Jesus could so powerfully convey the saving love of God and instil such a confidence in his devotees only because he comes from God and is truly divine in his being.

"Christ struck the key-note of his doctrine when he announced his divinity before an astonished and amazed world in these words: 'I and my Father are one.' 'I can assure you, my friends, that I love Christ and honour him more for the sake of these words than for anything else. For these memorable and imperishable words furnish an index to the mystery and glory of his real character.... Christ ignored and denied his self altogether ... and as his self ebbed away, Heaven came pouring into the soul... As soon as the soul is emptied of self, the Divinity fills the void... He lived and moved and had his being in God.'" (203-205)

"When Jesus was asked by one of his disciples to show the Father, he wondered and said: You have seen me, and yet you venture to say, you have not seen the Father? He felt that the Father's Spirit was gushing out in fresh and unceasing streams from his innermost soul through his words and actions. Those who saw him were therefore reminded that it was not his life, for he had no self, it was the divine life in him that they saw." (206)

The Christological basis for faith in the divinity of Christ Sen finds in the reality of the divine Logos that is made manifest in Christ.

"In glorifying Christ we only glorify the eternal Logos... Sum up all that is true and good and beautiful in the life of humanity, and you have the grand Logos of the early Christians, the Christ of universal Theism. This is the Christ who was in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and India. In the bards and the poets of the Rig Veda was he... He is *Cit*-Christ, pure and intelligent, the Word of God, mighty Logos. Thus all reason in man is Christ-reason, all love is Christ-love, all power is Christ-power... Go into the depth of your own consciousness and you will find the indwelling Logos, the Son of God, woven warp and woof into your inmost soul. Whatever in you is good and holy is the Son... Through sonship alone we are accepted by the Father." (237-240).

Consequently Sen could easily accept the truth of the pre-existence of Christ.

"The life of Christ springs from Divinity, and into Divinity it goes back. He found himself, in the past, dwelling in God, even before creation, and in the future, rewarding believers and rebuking unbelievers assembled after death before the judgement seat. He saw himself abiding eternally in God, before creation and after death. He existed in heaven before he had an earthly existence. Did he not say distinctly: 'Before Abraham was, I am?'" (207).

In the death and Resurrection of Christ Sen finds the saving work of God: Go has reconciled the world to himself through Christ.

"Atonement simply means at-one-ment: to be at *one*, to be reconciled. The central idea of atonement is unity, or the reconciliation of humanity with divinity. Man waged war with God, through atonement they are reconciled. Man waged war with man; they are reconciled through atonement. The atoning medium in each case is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.. Christ has offered himself as an atonement for all flesh and for all eternity... He died for you and me, and the atonement on our side is completed. He gave his life that we sinners may gain life eternal and get reconciled to God. Shall I not love him who so loved the world that he gave himself a willing sacrifice and an atonement for fallen humanity?" (272-276, 231)

"What does Resurrection mean? It means evidently that though Christ was immeasurably exalted on earth as the Son of God,... when he went back to his Father he returned with all his humanity and he still is with his God as His human son. He shows us how we can exalt our humanity by making it more and more Divine, how while retaining our humanity we may still partake more and more of the Divine character. It was for this purpose that Christ came into this world." (229-230)

Sen launched a spiritual movement which he called the *New Dispensation*: a truly Indian community of Christ, a community fully resting on what was best in the religious tradition of India and fully loyal to the original teaching of Christ.



"The Church of the New Dispensation, which you see in India, is altogether an institution of the Holy Spirit. Its morality is the command of the Holy Spirit, its prayer is a direct address to the Spirit, its heaven is a tranquil abiding in the Spirit, its Church is brotherhood in the Spirit, its wisdom is the inspiration of the Spirit, its apostles are ordained of the Spirit.. *Sat Cit Ananda* is our motto. It shall be India's motto. *Sat Cit Ananda* was, is and shall for ever be India's God... This New Dispensation destroys not, but fulfils the theology of Christ." (244-246).

"The New Dispensation is the harmony of all scriptures and saints and all sects. It is the harmony of reason and faith, of inspiration and science, of devotion and duty. It is the harmony of the ascetic and the householder, of the east and the west, of the ancient and the modern. It is the harmony of the Veda and the Purana, of the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the harmony of yoga and bhakti. It is the harmony of youth and age, of man and woman. It is an explanation of the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation..." (344)

## Christ the Embodiment of divine Love

(*Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*)

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) was a man of intense devotion and deep mystical perceptions. As a genuine *bhakta* he could surrender himself to God through any authentic form of the Divine. He was deeply moved by the person of Jesus as the New Testament was read to him by Jadu Mallick. His mystical encounter with Christ as he was intently watching the painting of Mary with baby Jesus is narrated in the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* as follows:

"He became gradually overwhelmed with divine emotion and breaking through the barriers of creed and religion, he entered a new realm of ecstasy. Christ possessed his soul. For three days he did not set foot in the Kali temple. On the fourth day in the afternoon as he was walking on the Pachvati, he saw coming towards him a person with beautiful large eyes, serene countenance, and fair skin. As the two faced each other, a

voice sang out in the depths of Sri. Ramakrishna's soul: Behold the Christ, who shed his heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men... It's he, the Master Yogin, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love incarnate'. The Son of Man embraced the divine Mother and merged in him. Sri Ramakrishna realised his identity with Christ, as he had already realised his identity with Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Radha, Krishna, Brahaman and Mohammed. The Master went into *samadhi* and communed with the Brahaman with attributes." (Introduction)

### **Christ the Jeevanmukta** (*Swami Vivekananda*)

Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902) was one of the brilliant minds of the recent history of India. He has been a genuine seeker of Truth within and beyond religions. Hence he could respect the greatness and accept the limitations of every particular religion. He found in Vedanta the apex of human search, the *pure religion*. The core of Vedantic experience is the ultimate oneness with the Divine, and consequently the attitude of compassion towards all beings. Jesus Christ is for Vivekananda an articulation of this oneness and an embodiment of this universal compassion. Hence he could willingly accept Jesus Christ as the expression of and way to the union between the human and the Divine. Jesus Christ is in the language of Vivekananda a supreme *Yogin*, a *Jeevanmukta*. It is significant that Vivekananda chose the eve of Christmas to initiate the Ramakrishna Mission. Vivekananda shares his insights on the person and mystery of Christ in the manifold talks he gave to various groups in India and abroad.

(The following texts have been taken from: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Vols I-VIII, 7th ed. 1985).

For Vivekananda faith in Christ is ultimately faith in the divinity that is imbedded in our own human nature. The Divine spark that is in us has grown into a flame in Jesus; we are all called to have that same experience.

"God became Christ to show man his true nature, that we too are God. We are human coverings over the Divine, but as the divine Man, Christ and we are one." (VII, 4)

"The history of the world is the history of persons like Buddha and Jesus. The passionless and unattached do most for the world. Picture Jesus in the slums. He sees beyond the misery: You, my brethren, are all divine. His work is calm; he removes causes." (VIII, 226)

"The Absolute cannot be worshipped, so we must worship a manifestation, such a one as has our nature. Jesus had our nature; he became the Christ; so can we, and so *must* we. Christ and Buddha were the names of a state to be attained; Jesus and Gautama were the persons to manifest it." (VII, 29)

Vivekananda finds in the opening verses of John's prologue *the whole essence of Christianity*. Christ is the manifestation of the divine Logos:

"The Word has two manifestations: the general one of nature, and the special one of the great Incarnations of God, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna.... Christ, the special manifestation of the Absolute, is known and knowable. The Absolute cannot be known: we cannot know the Father, only the Son. We can only see the Absolute through the 'tint of humanity', through Christ." (VII, 3)

"Jesus Christ was God – the Personal God become man. He has manifested Himself many times in different forms and these alone are what you can worship... We have to worship Jesus Christ, the human manifestation, as God... If you want to have a hold on spiritual life, cling close to God as manifest in Christ." (VIII, 190)

Vivekananda could accept Christ as the Incarnation of God, however not as the only Incarnation. Gripped by the Vedantic sense of the divine Mystery he upholds that no particular human mould can exhaustively reveal the incomprehensible Mystery.



"Christ was God incarnate." (I, 326)

"When intelligence is perfect we get the Incarnation—the Christ. Intelligence is always trying to manifest itself and in order to do this it is creating minds and bodies of different degrees of development." (VI 128)

"The Christ who is the Incarnation of God, who has not forgotten his divinity - that Christ can help us; in him there is no imperfection. These Incarnations are always conscious of their own divinity; they know it from their birth. These great Ones are untouched by aught of earth; they assume our form and our limitations for a time in order to teach us." (VII, 4)

"If I, as an Oriental, have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left for me, that is, to worship him as God and nothing else." (IV, 143)

"Let us find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth but in all the great Ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are manifestations of the same Infinite God." (IV, 152)

"In Christianity when you speak of the Incarnation, of the Trinity, of salvation through Jesus Christ, I am with you. I say, 'very good; that I also hold true.' But when you go on to say, 'there is no other true religion, there is no other revelation of God'. then I say, 'stop, I cannot go with you when you shut out, when you deny". (VI, 138)

In his attempts to understand the mystery of Christ Vivekananda uses familiar Indian titles like, *Jeevanmukta* (the liberated self), *Yogin* (the one united with the Absolute) and *Sannyasin* (the one who has fully surrendered oneself to God)

"The power is with the silent ones, who only live and love and then withdraw their personality. They never say 'me' and 'mine'. They are only blessed in being instruments. Such men are the makers of Christs and Buddhas, ever living fully identified with

God, ideal existences, asking nothing, and not consciously doing anything. They are the real movers, the *Jeevanmuktas*, absolutely selfless, the little personality entirely blown away, ambition non-existent. They are all principle, no personality." (VII, 16)

"Therefore the perfect man is the highest reflection of that Being who is both subject and object... That is why men worship Incarnations, such as Christ or Buddha. They are the most perfect manifestations of the eternal Self. They are much higher than all the conceptions of God that you or I can make. A perfect man is much higher than such conceptions. In him the circle becomes complete: the subject and the object become one. In him all delusions go away and in their place comes the realisation that he has always been that perfect Being." (III, 9)

"Christ was a *Sannyasin*, and his religion is essentially fit for Sannyasins only. His teachings may be summed up as: Give up! Nothing more—being fit for the favoured few." (VI, 109)

Vivekananda wants that we develop a positive attitude to ourselves: we are not primarily sinners but children of God. Jesus awakens us to this new consciousness.

"I am not this limited little being. I am the universal soul. I am the life of all sons of the past. I am the soul of Buddha, of Jesus, of Mohammed... Stand up then, this is the highest worship. You are one with the universe. That only is humility - not crawling upon all fours and calling yourself a sinner." (I, 341)

"The one work that the whole life of Jesus showed was to call upon us to realise our own spiritual nature. Give up, he says, these superstitious dreams that you are low and that you are poor. Think not that you are trampled upon and tyrannised over as if you were slaves, for within you is something that can never be tyrannised over, never be trampled upon, never be troubled, never be killed. You are all Sons of God, immortal spirit. 'Know', Jesus declared, 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.'" (IV. 146)

The dialectics between *bhakti* and *jnana* is a basic perception of Vedanta. As devotees we need to worship God in particular forms; but as seekers of Self-realisation we should go beyond all such personal forms and open ourselves to the Mystery beyond. Vivekananda discovers this message in the teachings of Jesus, and upholds that in relation to Christ too this dialectics must be alive.

"The worship of Buddha or of Christ constitute a *prateeka*, a drawing near to the worship of God. But this worship of Buddha or of Christ will not save a man; he must go beyond them to Him who manifested Himself as Jesus Christ, for God alone can give us freedom... If a man worships Jesus Christ and thinks he will be saved by that, he is mistaken entirely... We must not project any image upon God... We may worship a picture as God, but not God as the picture." (IV, 47)

"Note the common prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father who are in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name... it is the common prayer, because it is intended for the uneducated masses. To a higher circle, to those who had advanced a little more, Jesus gave a more elevated teaching: I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you... And he said: 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High'." (V, 148)

Devotion to Jesus, Faith in Christ, is therefore an insertion into the spiritual transformation manifest in Jesus Christ. True to his Vedantic perspective Vivekananda emphasises that what happened in Jesus has to happen in each of us.

"When these are thought of, these great Ones, they manifest themselves in our souls, and they make us like unto them. Our whole nature changes and we become like them. The very touch of one of them will be manifest upon a man; when Christ *touches*, the whole soul of man will change, that man will be transfigured just as He was. His whole life will be spiritualised; from every pore of his body spiritual power will emanate... So in worshipping Christ, in praying to Him, we must always remember what we are seeking. Not those foolish things of miraculous display, but the wonderful powers of the Spirit, which make man free, give



him control over the whole of nature, take from him the badge of slavery, and show God unto him." (IV, 32-33)

### Jesus the Messenger of Peace (*Mahatma Gandhi*)

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) the *Father of the Nation* has often been acclaimed as being more *Christian* than most Christians. The observation of Albert Schweitzer on Gandhi is well-known: Generations would hardly believe that such a person has really walked on this earth! Gandhi would describe himself primarily as *Satyagrahi*, an ardent *seeker of Truth*. For him Truth is God and God is Truth. His passionate search for Truth brought him to the core of the message of Jesus Christ. This he found primarily in the *Sermon on the Mount*, which together with the Bhagavad Gita gave shape to his spirituality of resistance in non-violence. What fascinated Gandhi is more the liberative message of Jesus than the historical person himself.

(The following texts of Gandhi have been cited from the anthology: Robert Ellsberg (ed), *Gandhi on Christianity*, New York, Orbis, 1991).

For Gandhi Jesus has been primarily a Teacher of humanity; Jesus taught a new law of love that appeals to all, and inspires all:

"Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the great teachers who have made a considerable influence on my life.. I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus... The great teachers of humanity had their places not given to them; the place has belonged to them as a matter of right, as a matter of service that they have rendered." (In Ceylon, 1927)

Of all the things I read, what remained with me for ever was that Jesus came almost to give a *new law* – though he of course had said that he had not come to give a new law, but take something on to the old Mosaic law. Well, he changed it so that it became a new law – not an eye for an eye, not a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when only one was given, and to go two miles when they were asked to go one." (Christmas, 1931)

As a *disciple of Jesus* - but not a Christian - Gandhi found a perennial relevance in the teachings of Jesus. Hence the historicity of the person of Jesus has not been the central concern of the thought of Gandhi:

"I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me" (Christmas, 1931)

"If Jesus represents not a person but the principle of non-violence, India has accepted its protecting power." (In *The Message of Jesus*, Ahmedabad 1940)

The *Sermon on the Mount* meant for Gandhi the epitome of Jesus Teachings and hence a norm for evaluating the authenticity of Christianity.

"I saw that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me." (Christmas, 1931)

"I have not been able to see any difference between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner Gita reduces to a scientific formula.. Today supposing I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a little copy of the Sermon I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita." (*Young India*, 22, December 1927)

In experiencing the transforming power of *ahimsa* Gandhi was much inspired by the teachings and life of Jesus:

"Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal." Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal Law of Love." (*Harjan*, 7 January 1939)

"He who when being kicked bears no anger against his murderer and even asks God to forgive him is truly non-violent. History relates this of Jesus Christ." (*Harijan*, 28, April, 1946)

Gandhi found on the Cross of Christ the inspiring example of an active and non-violent resistance to evil. This is not weakness of character, but the power of the divine Spirit in the human person.

"Christ died on the Cross with a crown of thorns on his head defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise resistance of a non-violent character, I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers." (*Young India*, 12. May 1920)

"As the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore, we dare not think of birth without death on the Cross. Living Christ means a living Cross, without it life is a living death." (Christmas, 1931)

"God did not bear the Cross only nineteen hundred years ago, but He bears it today, and He dies and is resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world, if it had to depend upon a historical God who died two thousand years ago. Do not then preach the God of history but show Him as He lives today through you." (in the *Message of Jesus*, Ahmedabad, 1940)

(Speaking of an inspiring image of the Crucified Christ in Rome):  
"It was not without a wrench that I could tear myself away from that scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others, but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself."  
(*Young India*, 31, December 1931)

For Gandhi Jesus Christ is not just a historical person of yesterday, but a living reality of today. He is born in us, and he lives through us, transforming our life.

"As long as it remains a hunger still unsatisfied, as long as Christ is not yet born, we have to look forward to Him. When



real peace is established, we will not need demonstrations, but it will be echoed in our life, not only in individual life, but in corporate life. Then we shall say, Christ is born. That is to me the real meaning of the verse we have sung. Then we will not think of a particular day in the year as that of the birth of the Christ, but as an ever-recurring event which can be enacted in every life." (Christmas, 1931)

"In Jesus' own life is the key of His nearness to God: that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and recognise Him as the Son of God. But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense does exist." (*The Modern Review*, October, 1941)

Gandhi believed in the universal significance of Jesus Christ; but he would not agree with the Christian claim of the absolute uniqueness of Christ:

"Because the life of Jesus has the significance and transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name, or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors." (*The Modern Review*, October, 1941)

"God alone is absolutely perfect. When He descends to earth, He of His own accord limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh." (*Harijan* 17, April 1937)

"Jesus, to me' is a great world teacher among others. He was to the devotees of his generation no doubt 'the only begotten Son of God.' Their belief need not be mine. He affects my life no less because I regard him as one among the many *begotten* sons of God. The adjective *begotten* has, for me, a deeper and possibly a grander meaning than its literal meaning. For me, it implies spiritual birth. In his own times he was the nearest to God." (*Harijan*, 18, April, 1936)

"I am sure that if Jesus were living here and now among men, He would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard His name if only their lives embodied the virtues of which He was a living example on earth: the virtues of loving one's neighbour as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellowmen." (*The Modern Review*, October 1941)

Though Gandhi welcomes Christ into his life, he was very critical of the way Christianity, especially the western type of Christianity, projected the image of Christ:

"Today I rebel against orthodox Christianity, as I am convinced that it has distorted the message of Jesus. He was an Asian whose message was delivered through many media, and when it had the backing of a Roman Emperor it became an imperialist faith as it remains to this day." (*Harijan*, 30, May 1936).

"In my humble opinion, much of what passes as Christianity is a negation of the *Sermon on the Mount*. And please mark my words. I am not at the present moment speaking of the Christian conduct. I am speaking of the Christian belief, of Christianity as it is understood in the West." (*Young India*, 8 December, 1927)

## Christ the Ecstasy of the Spirit

(Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan)

S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) well-known philosopher and former president of India had very close associations with the circles of Christian thought. He tries to interpret Christ from his neo-Vedanta perspectives. Religion is the 'relentless search for the Eternal, for the Absolute' and spirituality is the core of religion, the experience of the Divine. Jesus realised this search and experience and he gives light to the seekers on their spiritual pilgrimage. The message of Jesus, Radhakrishnan emphasises, had the overtones of asceticism and renunciation, contemplation and mystical insights. But later Christianity distorted this original message of Christ into a package of dogmas and rituals. Encounter with India's spiritual heritage, Radhakrishnan

hopes, will help Christianity discover the true Christ. He meets Christ at the cross-roads of *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*.

(The texts are taken from, Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavad Gita*, George Allen, London, 1970. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford, Delhi, 1974. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, London, 1933. Radhakrishnan, *Fragments of a Confession / Reply to Critics*, in Paul Arthur Schlipp (ed), *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, New York, 1952. Radhakrishnan, *Heart of Hinduism*, Natesan, Madras, 1932.)

For Radhakrishnan Jesus is an Easterner who resonates with the Indian religious psyche. The spiritual insights of Jesus is much in tune with the Upanishadic traditions.

"The characteristics of intuitive realisation, non-dogmatic tolerance, as well as insistence on the non-aggressive virtues and universalist ethics, mark Jesus out as a typical Eastern seer." (*East and West*, 58)

"When the Upanishads speak of *jnana* or gnosis, when the Buddha speaks of *bodhi* or enlightenment, when Jesus speaks of the 'truth that will make us free'. they refer to the mode of direct spiritual apprehension of the Supreme, in which the gap between Truth and Being is closed." (*Fragments of a Confession*, 60)

"Jesus enlarges and transforms the Jewish conceptions in the light of his own personal experience. In this process he was helped considerably by his religious environment, which included Indian influences, as the tenets of the Essenes and the Book of Enoch show. In his teachings of the Kingdom of God, life eternal, ascetic emphasis and even future life, Jesus breaks away from the Jewish tradition and approximates to Hindu and Buddhist thought. Though his teaching is historically continuous with Judaism, it did not develop from it in its essentials." (*Eastern Religions*, 176)

As a true Vedantin Radhakrishnan does not give much importance



to the historical person of Jesus. The liberative experience of Jesus has a universal significance.

"So long as the life of Jesus is regarded as a mere event in history which occurred nineteen hundred years ago there can be no understanding of what that life should mean to us." (*Eastern Religions*, 59)

"For me the person of Jesus is a historical fact. Christ is not a datum of history, but a judgement of history. Jesus' insight is expressive of a timeless spiritual fact." (*Reply to Critics*, 807)

"Christ is born in the depths of the spirit. We say that he passes through life, dies on the Cross and rises again. Those are not so much historical events which occurred once upon a time as universal processes of spiritual life, which are being continually accomplished in the souls of men. Those who are familiar with the way in which the Krishna story is interpreted will feel inclined to regard Christhood as an attainment of the soul, a state of inward glorious illumination in which the divine wisdom has become the heritage of the soul." (*Fragments*, 79)

Radhakrishnan believes in the incarnation of the Divine in Jesus Christ. However his understanding of the embodiment of the Divine is coloured by the Indian perception of *avatara*:

"*Avatara* means descent, one who has descended. The Divine comes down to the earthly plane to raise it to a higher status. God descends when man rises. The purpose of the *avatar* is to inaugurate a new world, a new dharma. By his teaching and example he shows how a human being can raise himself to a higher grade of life." (*Bhagavad Gita*, 155)

"Jesus is the example of a man who has become God and none can say where his manhood ends and his divinity begins; Man and God are akin. That art Thou, *Tat tvam asi*." (*Heart of Hinduism*, 100)

The interpretation of the Cross and Resurrection too bears Vedantic connotations: Cross is death to the ego and Resurrection the insertion

to a higher consciousness. Jesus thus embodies what is to happen deep within each seeker.

"The life, death and Resurrection of Christ are an illustration of a universal principle. " (*Eastern Religions*, 223)

"The secret of the Cross is the crucifixion of the ego and the yielding to the will of God. 'Thy will be done'. Every man by merging his will in the will of God, by losing his self in submission to God, finds the truth of his own self. " (*Eastern Religions*, 97)

"We must endure the terrible awakening summed up in Jesus' words, 'My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?' When the individual withdraws from the empirical, when he penetrates to the Centre, when the objective world falls away, he affirms the reality of the spirit, which is not an object, which is not a temporal existent, which, though in time, is not of it. Faith in such a non-object principle is the defeat of death, and the renewal of life. When the spirit is affirmed dread is annulled." (*Fragments of a Confession*, 56)

"The Cross is not an offence or a stumbling block to the Hindu, but it is the great symbol of the redemptive activity of God. It shows how love is rooted in self-sacrifice. " (*Heart of Hinduism*, 120)

"The resurrection is not the rise of the dead from their tombs but the passage from the death of self-absorption to the life of unselfish love, the transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit, from falsehood to truth, from the slavery of the world to the liberty of the Eternal." (*Eastern Religions*, 47)

With a Hindu sensitivity Radhakrishnan believes in Christ the embodiment of the universal principle of union between the human and the Divine:

"What do you think of Christ is undoubtedly the most important problem. To an educated Hindu Jesus is a supreme illustration of the growth from human origins to divine destiny. As a mystic,

who believes in the inner light, Jesus ignores ritual and is indifferent to legalistic piety... Being other worldly in spirit he is indifferent to the wealth of the world and exalts poverty as one of the greatest goods... He is the great person who exemplifies the noblest characteristics of manhood, the revealer of the profoundest depths of ourselves, one who brings home to us the ideal of human perfection by embodying it visibly in himself." (*Reply to Critics*, 507)

This is not a comprehensive account of the way the leaders of Indian renaissance perceived Jesus Christ. But they indicate the direction taken by enlightened Hindus in understanding Christ and letting Christ transform their lives. Their insights and their credible way of life are a significant contribution towards developing a genuinely Indian interpretation of the mystery of Christ.

Sameeksha

Kalady



## The Christ We Adore★

Swami Ranganathananda

Man, as spiritual seeker, transcends the sphere of law and commandments of a religion. Whereas law and commandments relate him to parochial and temporal interests, spirituality relates him to the eternal and the infinite. Jesus came to offer this to man, to give the bread of life to the spiritually hungry. Insistence on correct ritualistic behaviour does not bring satisfaction to man at this stage. They are as stones to a hungry man, as the New Testament puts it. Jesus proclaimed a religion of wide and deep horizons; he brought God near to man and bound both with the cord of love; he eliminated fear as the medium of their relationship. With love implanted in his heart in place of fear, man emerged as the lover of his fellow men; he learnt to find fulfilment in a life of love for God and service to man, to God in man. This love for God, this intimate communion with Him, is the fulfilment of the righteous life; it is the only means of satisfying the soul's spiritual hunger. This is the *essential* of religion. It holds that man has a higher dimension which transcends his physical and social personality; he is essentially spiritual; in that inmost being of his lies his intimacy with and closeness to the divine, and his kinship to all creation. Religion is the realization of this spiritual fact and its expression in life and behaviour.

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★The following are excerpts from an important and inspiring paper by Swami Ranganathananda, Supreme Head of the Ramakrishna Mission.

This is something we understand well in India: the tremendous magnetism of a spiritual teacher who finds and gathers round him those who are to be his spiritual intimates and the bearers of his message, the pure ones who have the capacity to share his inmost thoughts and relieve his loneliness. Buddha, after his illumination, went to Varanasi to gather his five disciples. We are reminded, in this connection, of the words which Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) spoke at the close of the period of his *sadhana*, describing the longing of his heart for his disciples: 'A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companion, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning the devotees began to arrive' (Swami Nikhilananda, *Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India*, p. 38)

Jesus now began to move about with his disciples preaching the kingdom of heaven in the synagogues, and performing various miracles of healing. But the congregations of the synagogues could not understand or appreciate him. They were certainly looking for the advent of a heavenly kingdom; but it was one largely political in complexion, tribal in scope, and intended to free the Jews from the hated Romans. One who claimed to be the promised Messiah had to fulfil this national demand. Jesus did claim to be the Messiah in direct and indirect references, but made only vague mystical references to the kingdom. He merely incurred the displeasure of the orthodox. But the masses followed him, fascinated by his personality and the miracles he wrought. Although he delivered his message in the famous 'Sermon on the Mount' to his disciples alone, it has provided spiritual nourishment to vast masses of mankind these nineteen hundred years.

The Sermon on the Mount was a tremendous departure from the accepted ideas of the time; it was a mighty attempt to release the life of the spirit from the shackles of tribal morality and dogmatic religion. Old familiar words were used, but they were given new meanings; old moral codes were invoked, but they received an inward content and direction; old familiar hopes were mentioned, only to be filled with new spiritual meanings. And all these innovations had been prefaced with a 'but I say unto you', conveying a sense of authority. It was no wonder

that the people were astonished at his doctrine.

Here is refreshing statement of the scope and goal of religion. The emphasis is on *sadhana*, the practice of religion, with a view to attaining *anubhava*, realization. 'Religion is realization; it is being and becoming' in the words of Swami Vivekananda; it is character. It is not a cosy belief, but an adventure, something that sets the soul on fire, the carrying, as Jesus would say, of one's cross by oneself and not by proxy. It reminds us of Buddha's last words addressed to his dear disciple, Ananda: 'Be a lamp unto yourself, O Ananda; depend not on any external refuge; work out your emancipation with diligence.'

In between the harassments of the priests, Jesus did a lot of teaching: first to the simple masses and then to his close disciples. To the former he spoke in parables, making thereby difficult subjects easy to comprehend. Each one of these parables, like the parables of the good Samaritan, elucidates one or other aspect of his central theme, the life of godliness. Some of them, like the parable of the Ten Virgins, are full of mystical significance. He spoke to the disciples about the service of man, the poor, the sick, the homeless, the naked, and the forlorn, in the spirit of the worship of God.

'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matthew, XXV. 40).

He charged the disciples to go forth and preach the gospel among the people, and he prescribed a way of life and behaviour for the preachers, which breathes the spirit of renunciation, dependence on God, non-possession, peacefulness, and humility, echoing the exhortation of Buddha to his disciples. It is a tragedy of history that subsequent Christian preachers, unlike the Buddhists, have largely strayed from the strait and narrow path shown by their great Master.

To his chosen disciples, Jesus gave his spiritual teachings directly and without the aid of parables. He revealed to them, a few days before his death, his true personality as the Christ, the anointed One, and charged them not to tell it to anyone else till the day of resurrection: I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father



also. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.... Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works' (John, XIV. 6-10)

He asked all those who would choose to follow him to be prepared to deny themselves and take up their crosses; it was not a cosy and comfortable religion that he offered but a heroic path of adventure, a life of total renunciation in the love of God: 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matthew, XVI. 25-26).

His life is full of sweetness and tenderness, tragedy and pathos; it is spiritually inspiring. To us in India, however, the end is just a tragedy, bereft of any special spiritual beauty. It is the life that is, in our view, spiritually beautiful and elevating. The deaths of our own spiritual heroes, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, were near tragic; but we did not build our religion on them. India treats the manner of their deaths most casually, while she seeks to build her religion on their lives and teachings.

It is no wonder that ordinary people do not understand the depths of a divine incarnation's personality; they can at best appreciate his miracles, while missing his character. Too much insistence on these miracles converts religion into a sort of magic, and degrades the content of the life-giving message to cheapness. All great teachers, including Jesus, therefore, discountenanced them. The difficulty of recognizing an incarnation has been well expressed by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*; only a few can understand him; the rest will deride him or just ignore him: *Avajananti mam mudha manusim tanumasritam; param bhavamajananto mama bhutamahesvaram* – 'Fools deride me when invested with a human body, not being able to grasp my transcendent nature as the supreme Lord of all beings' (*Bhagavad - Gita*, IX. 11)

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus is the measure of the intolerance and folly of the contemporary society. There is pathos in the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the

prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathereth thy children together, even as hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Matthew, XXIII. 37)

Persecution is the outcome of intolerance which is a social malady arising out of the limitations of its *Weltanschauung*. India was, and is, fortunately free from this malady, thanks to its generous spiritual outlook which finds beautiful elucidation in several of our sacred books: 'Knowers of Truth declare that it is the same non-dual Reality that is spoken of as Brahman (Absolute) by the philosophers, as Atman (Self) by the mystics, and as Isvara (God) by the devotees' – *Vadanti tat tattvavidah tattvam yat jnanam advayam; Brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate (Bhagavata, I. 2. 11)*.

The crucifixion was a tragedy of the first magnitude; but a greater tragedy was the way it was handled. Woven into the prevailing dogmas, it slowly became central to the new movement. The man of joy, which Jesus undoubtedly was in real life, became transformed into the man of sorrows, in dogma. We may find a forbidding austerity in John the Baptist; but the Son of Man, as he himself has said, came eating and drinking, trailing clouds of humour and laughter. By transforming him into a man of sorrow, dogma has helped to turn his religion into grim and cheerless aspects, with serious consequences for the emotional life of its followers. Only a few great saints have been able to penetrate through this spiritual heaviness. 'A sad nun is a bad nun', wrote St. Theresa; and she exclaimed: 'O Lord, save us from sullen saints!'

The dogma of one man's sin affecting all humanity gave rise to its logical corollary of the dogma of one man's blood washing away the sins of all; such an approach led inevitably to a chain reaction of such tragedies involving the lives of Stephen and Joseph, Peter and Paul, immediately after, and of countless other good and noble and innocent souls thereafter. The theory that the blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church developed out of this dogma; and, in place of calm reason and generous love, frenzy, fanaticism, intolerance, and bigotry gripped the propagation of the life-giving message of Jesus down the centuries, destroying as many lives as it undoubtedly helped to build, with groups

interchanging places as persecutor and victim.

It is interesting to speculate how the message would have spread, like a little leaven leavening the whole bread, from one good soul to another in comparative peace and goodwill, if the divine life and sublime teachings of Jesus had found the central place, instead of the popular and striking dogmas of 'the scapegoat' and 'the atonement', physical resurrection and the second advent, earthly kingdom, and the imminence of the Day of Judgement. These dogmas were purely tribal in their scope, including the prevalent concept of the monotheistic god. They were the nurseries of contemporary Jewish patriotism and national cohesion, sectarian intolerance and political frenzy.

This fettering, in cast-iron dogmas, of the universal message of Jesus – the ideas of the indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal ethics, and spiritual realization— caused the distortion of its universality through bigotry and intolerance, and the dilution of its peace and love content with hatred, violence, and war.

The only impression that the Gospels warrant us to carry is that Jesus meant his movement to be at first a deepening and, eventually, a broadening of his people's heritage. He took in much before he gave out in ample measure; he came to fulfil and not to destroy 'the law and prophets'. Here was an attempt at a lofty spiritual synthesis by an equally lofty spiritual character. But history records the tragedy of its failure; the word 'fulfil' was slowly interpreted, not in its spiritual sense as meant by Jesus, but in its prevailing socio - political significance; and this not merely by the Jews, but also by the new movement, which led to the dissatisfaction of Jews against the movement with its tragic consequences, on the one hand, and the strait-jacketing of the soaring spirit of the new movement itself in the 'letter' of the dogmas of the old faith, on the other.

The new movement thus began as an uneasy combination of the universal and the tribal, the spiritual and the dogmatic, the peaceful and the passionate. The latter elements in their original context, which was consciously parochial and limited, were constructive and creative; but in their new context of the universal, they became largely negative

and destructive. The former elements, however, became the source of the high spiritual, mystical, and humanitarian temper of the new movement. The history of Christianity, in its twin records of persecution, violence, and war, on the one side, and lofty mysticism, moral passion, and humanitarianism on the other, bears the impress of this inner division, which also explains its recurrent conflicts with science. A successful synthesis needs the guidance of an adequate *Weltanschauung*, which was not available at the time. *The successful synthesis of thought elements, each one of which is vital and powerful, flowing as they do from human experience at various levels – the ethical passion of Judaism, the mystical and humanitarian fervour of Christianity, and the rational temper of science – calls for the guidance of a philosophy or world-view such as that of the Vedanta, which is not afraid of any aspect of experience, but seeks truth in all of them with zestful detachment and devotion.*

It is against this background that we view with hope the future of Indian Christianity. Under the guidance of the philosophy of Vedanta, the Christian message in India can achieve that synthesis by which it will flow as an entirely constructive force with its universal elements functioning free in the spirit of the universal, and its dogmatic elements digested and retained to accord with the spirit of the universal and human.

Our people have the genius, inherent and active, to appreciate a truly spiritual message; our minds are hospitable to spiritual ideas, however new or startling they may be. *The message of Jesus and his life divine have found their lodgement in the Indian soul, through the irresistible appeal of their beauty and charm.* It is our earnest hope that the Christian message passing through Indian experience will bear in its look a new charm and force of tolerance and gentleness, peace and fellowship, capturing thus the Master's spirit *in full*.

The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of spiritual redemption. That gospel has a meaning only when we feel the bondage of worldliness irk-some and heavy, and seek for freedom in the freedom of God. There is the assurance given by the Master that we shall then get what we seek.



To ask and seek and knock is our share, and to give and reveal and open is the Lord's. That is the mood and attitude in which we adore Christ. That is the Hindu way of acceptance and assimilation.

President  
Rama Krishna Mission  
Belur Math, Calcutta.

## Christ - Ascent of the Human and Descent of the Divine

Swami Siddhinathananda

Years ago I had an occasion to participate in a Christian-Hindu dialogue in Tiruvalla. In the course of my talk I interpreted some of Christ's sayings in my own way. Some one from the audience took exception to my version saying that the official interpretation was different, I said: 'Christ is not your monopoly'.

Jesus Christ is often designated as the Son of Man and the Son of God. How to understand this apparently contradictory descriptions?

Of all the World Religions, only two, Hinduism and Christianity, subscribe to the theory of God's coming down to save humankind. That is the only way we can understand that God has any concern for the world. Otherwise, it would have been a cruel joke on the part of God to leave His creatures to their fate without lending them a helping hand in their hour of need. No, God has not left them in the lurch. He incarnates Himself in the world for its protection. This is a cardinal principle of Hinduism. Christianity also accepts this with a reservation. Hindus hold that God comes down *whenever* necessity arises whereas Christians contend that God came down only *once* in the form of Christ, never before, nor will at any time in the future. That will be a human imposition of a limitation on God's freedom. Who is man to limit God's will? That is an untenable proposition. God can and will come to the rescue of His creation whenever necessity arises.

Christ is the Messiah anointed and sent by the Lord for the

redemption of humanity. Jesus is the Son of Man. In Jesus Christ, we see the ascent of the human and the descent of the Divine. Man and God meet and mingle in Jesus Christ.

In the teachings of the Masters, there are two types, the local and the universal or the temporal and the eternal. This is a well recognised principle in Hinduism, not so in other religions. The eternal is called *sruti* and the temporal *smriti*. Personality-centred religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam give more importance to the person of the founder than to his teachings. The person is bound by historical and geographical accidents. Christ hailed from the Jewish tradition. A lot of His teachings were addressed to the Jews. The series of 'Woes' He pronounced, beginning with Matthew 23:13 - 'But woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites' - are local and temporal. The sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:3) - is eternal and universal.

The call to love the Lord with all the heart, soul and mind and the neighbour as oneself (Mat 22:37-39) is universal.

Christianity in India cannot strictly be called a foreign religion, for, the seed only was brought from outside, but the land was Indian. St. Thomas brought the message of Christ. It appealed to some people in India and they accepted Him as their *Ishta-Devata*, chosen Deity. It is a well recognised principle from very ancient times in India that man is free to approach God in any name and any form. So some people took to the worship of Christ. The new group had all facilities to build their places of worship in India. The early churches were built on the same model as the Hindu temples. Hindus used to worship Siva or Vishnu or Devi, in their temples and here was another new messenger of God. The new group was not considered alien culturally. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Indian Christians were truly Indian, in fact and in spirit, culturally Indian. It was the Portuguese that changed the whole atmosphere. They persecuted even the local christians. From then on Indian Christians became aliens culturally. The Western missionaries were the fore-runners of imperialism and the then Indian Christians became the camp-followers of the imperialists.

This cultural cleavage has far-reaching national and political

consequences. Once at an inter-religious conference in Delhi, a Christian Father was explaining the political situation in Ceylon. Someone asked the speaker: "Whose is the leadership?" He replied: "Christians both Catholic and Anglican." Similar situations are raising their heads in the north-east of India.

Christians hold that there is salvation only through Christ. And they are busy trying to convert the whole world to Christianity. Christianity and Islam being equally aggressive in the matter of proselytisation, each finds the other's land forbidden ground for it. Both find India a fertile field for their activities. God is neither Hindu nor Christian nor Moslem. He is the God of all. To say that one's own concept of God alone is true is to limit God. The Hindu's God will be limited by the Christian's and vice-versa. A limited God is no God. To consider that one's own God alone is true is as good or as bad, as to say one's own mother alone is the true mother and all others are either step-mothers or mothers-in-law. To make God the monopoly of one persuasion is blasphemy.

Had Christ come to India, He would never have been crucified. His religion would have taken a different turn and shape, perhaps like that of the Buddha. Since it spread among the aggressive and barbaric peoples of Europe, Christianity got coloured by the racial characteristics of those nations. In their hands, the peaceful message of Christ became a hand-maid of imperialism. Let us hear what Christ Himself has said on proselytisation. Matthew 23:15 says: "Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cross sea and land to make one proselyte and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." No, Christ does not approve of conversion.

All great men belong to the whole World. Their followers try to circumscribe them. Someone has made a distinction between Christianity and Churchianity. Saints and prophets keep alive the eternal message of their Master. Priests and parsons rule the roost in the Church. "Church is the first to persecute a potential saint." Says a biographer of St. Francis of Assisi.



Christ calls the weary and the heavy laden and promises peace. He asks all to seek, knock and ask and promises appropriate response. He said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away." (Mat 24:35)

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." (Mat 7:12)

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## Let then Be an Indian Christ

K.S. Radhakrishnan

Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary is not a wonder that occurred in a particular space-time context of history and faded away into a mystery without any reminiscences of his existence but he is the eternal recurrence of harmony of the spatio-temporal manifestations of the past, present and future. So he dwells in a piece of dust and stardom alike both in the latent and manifested form "to fulfil all righteousness" and to prove that "man shall not live by bread alone but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". Hence, he remains as the "saltiness of salt" of the macro and micro forms of existence here and elsewhere. Naturally he is within me as heaven and I am with him as earth even if I may or may not be able to recognise his presence in a positive way in my combat of life. In this sense Jesus is not a historic personality but a living reality that guides me from darkness to light through my own *karma*.

History, when it is understood as the compendium of past events, has to do only a little with the present living context. So the relevant question in Christ experience is not whether he was a historic personality or not but "what he has to do with us", i.e., how and in what way one is able to experience Christ in one's life. It is at this juncture that the fishermen become fishers of men, i.e., only when one experiences Christ in one's own context of life; in one's own manner of experience one can become a follower of Christ.

It is not an easy task to become a follower of Christ because to follow him, one has to practise 'love' of a very different order which

attains its fulfilment only when one is able to love one's enemy. In order to love one's enemy one has to give up the sense of discrimination of 'mine' and 'thine' and all other related binaries. In other words, only when one becomes free from all feelings of discrimination, one will be able to experience Christ and it is as difficult as 'a walk on a razor's edge.'

Naturally, there cannot be many more followers of Christ. But the world is filled with millions and millions of christians belonging to different sects of christianity. The institutionalised christianity or the church is more a socio-political organisation than an enduring spiritual endeavour which aims at the peaceful co-existence of everything including a piece of dust and stardom together. Hence the church is forced to make a distinction between christians and non-christians and to do the maximum favour for "our men" against "their men".

The sense of discrimination of the church begins with its inherent idea of anthropocentrism which enthrones man as the centre of the universe and justifies everything done in favour of man on earth and it paves the way for the exploitation of nature by man and justification of the same by religion. The idea of anthropocentrism is no doubt against the essence of spirituality because spirituality aims at the unity and co-existence of all. Though the traces of christianity can be seen in India from the very beginning of the christian religion it dominated and flourished in India during the reign of colonial rule. Colonial christianity tried to make the Indian people imitate the western christianity in name and form. Hence it failed to present the Christ-experience in the Indian context.

A radical change of this approach is essential to regain the spiritual dimension of Christ-experience in India. Since the people of India are more spiritualistic than the westerners, Christ can easily be acceptable to Indians as an *avatara* of Dharma if he is presented in the Indian context as spiritual experience rather than in an institutionalised form of religion which keeps "treasures on earth".

## Christ Came to Establish Dharma

Anjali Mookerjee

All religions emanating from the East have the same message: *Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram* (Truth, Well-Being and Beauty). How to achieve these goals is different with different place, time and person. Hindus are born as Hindus - no other initiation or rites are required to be in the fold of that religion. The root meaning of 'dharma (dhr) is to uphold the 'do-s' and 'do not-s' of life, to lead one smoothly in the path of life. The rites and rituals are ornaments of the time, added later. Dharma is subtly different from religion though they are taken as synonymous.

What Christ and Christianity mean to us today - and meant, say, at the time of St. Thomas - is bound to be vastly different. Christianity went to the West first and came back to the East - and India - in the garb of the West, i.e., western culture, with its good points and bad, but alien. We got these through the missionaries.

Christ, to me, is an 'Avatar' just as Gautam Buddha or Ramakrishna. Godliness or Godlessness is immaterial as long as one is a good person because God is the concept of the human; so either God is within us or we are a part of God. But in Christianity as preached by the missionaries there is a subtle inherent effort towards conversion. Conversion from any religion to another, to me, is a sign of weak mind and personality. Each and every person could remain in his or her own faith and be a good person. What do we mean by being 'good'- that what Buddha or Christ or Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharshi has shown the path-*mahajano Yeta gata Sa eva pantha*.

To me, Christianity in India presents Christ as the remover of



poverty, illiteracy, sufferings (bodily) and sins. Personally I am a product of missionary schools and colleges. I have great respect for the system. Indianisation of Christianity has helped a lot towards a smooth cultural transition.

God is one - there is no Christian God and Muslim God and Hindu God. And also, whenever dharma is in peril Avatars are sent to save us.

Is conversion for spiritual gains or material? A very minute fraction is for the former one. And those who are instrumental in bringing about conversion also believe (specially in the present age) that they are liberating 'the souls' from 'heathenism'?

In the Hindu Society we find conversions either in the lower strata (financially, educationally and most important, caste-wise) or, in the educated elite - like Michael Madhusudan, Datta and the like. Why? Because when religion becomes rigid with its formalities it loses religiosity. It happened in Hinduism also. Michael, and others like him, wanted an 'escape' from that rigidity.

Water takes the shape of the container: all religions are containers; God is water. Containers do not change the quality of water unless there is corrosion.

We can only obtain a glimpse of God through the Avatars, and Christ, to me is one such. Indianisation of Christ will bring him closer to the hearts of Indians.

*na tatra suryo bhati, na chandra tarakam  
nema vidyuto bhanti, kuto ayamagni:  
tameva bhantam anubhati sarvam  
tasya bhasa sarvamidam vibhati* (Kath Up. 5.15)

The Sun shines not there, nor the moon and the stars, these lightnings shine not, where then could this fire be? Everything shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all the world.

The eternal quest of the soul for that 'tad' will continue.

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# Jesus: Beyond all Space and Time

Nitin Vyas

To me, belonging as I do to a Hindu faith, the very name of Jesus Christ is symbolic of godly reincarnation (*avatar*) on earth. Hindus in general do accept and respect other religions and their prophets, Accordingly Jesus, no longer remains a stranger Deity to them. In tune with the well-known observation of Gita - *Yada Yada hi Dharmasya Glanirbhavati Bharata.....* Jesus is looked upon as a way to us all, as protecting, maintaining and enlightening the order of the universe. The coming of Jesus represents the Divine concern for man, who manifests whenever and wherever evil spirit preponderates over God's beautiful world. In this sense the advent of Jesus Christ signifies a purpose for humankind as a whole.

Looking historically, there was much instability and disorder in society at the time of the advent of Jesus Christ. Much discontent and deeply felt chaos prevailed all round the society. The so-called leaders then made God's Word null and void. In the midst of this darkness and clouds, the advent of Jesus is a message of Light and Hope. For, he is a reincarnation of God for the rejuvenation of the Rule of God. He not only spoke but also lived what he uttered. This he exemplifies even in his last trial of great physical suffering and mental anguish.

It means that the vision and life as personified in Jesus is not a matter of ancient past and a mere *fait accompli*. He is light and inspiration for us all today as ever. Although there is much progress in science and technology, numerous conflicts and strifes, exploitations and oppressions are galore in various spheres of the human and the

universe at large. Justice is still a far-cry in many human relations and perceptions of values. Terror stalks the world in many ways. In such a human predicament of modern existence, the life of Jesus as Son of God avatar implies a harbinger of peace and order and a precursor of a new order of life.

Jesus being a divine child reveals the highest Truth to us all through his own living. He is a great Redeemer and thus opens a New Way to Him for humanity. His attitude to life and people at large is worth appreciating. He mingles with and ennobles the lives of the most humble and ordinary people. Preferring always to remain a lowly one, Jesus is always ready to help and serve the poor. He testified in loving others through numerous examples as *loving his own self*.

Like some prophets and reincarnates in other religions, such a life of Jesus is significant for the future destiny of the human. The life of Jesus is a concrete example implying the way out of all present ills and malaise and leading to fundamental human liberty and dignity. All his struggles personify the struggle for the kingdom of God on earth. With full Godly determination and direction, Jesus squarely challenges all human realities and dilemmas. His life vividly calls us to love one another, as Jesus loved us all. This is his way to God through utter trust and absolute conviction in Him.

In a nutshell, the life of Jesus stands to us as a fountain-head of inspiration and direction. It is a call for a sincere commitment to and constant probing of the higher authentic human goal for all of us, individually and collectively. This new venture of Destiny means to go beyond all our narrow likes and dislikes, parochial attitudes of mine and thine, subjective limitations and self centeredness etc.

The fact exists as in other major religions of the world that people in general are not fully conscious of the ongoing complicated theological interpretations of various hues and colours. Still the essence of Christianity in the life of Jesus is not absent in the general mass of Indian people. They are convinced that God shows His way through the life and message of Jesus. At the same time the responsible leaders in Christianity must accept the composite culture of India

openly. There is a great need of frank acceptance of other religions and especially the major Hindu religion in India as a spring board for great tolerance and mutual acceptance for centuries. Hinduism has shown its inherent democratic nature through the millennia. The Christians of all denominations must stop doing anything that signals Hindus as being and remaining at the receiving end. The latter does not have an apparent huge organizational religious structure externally, but spiritually something abides in it which needs to be clearly appreciated in a spirit of equality and large heartedness.

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# **Jesus the Prophet of Liberative Love**

**Srisavitha**

I was born to Hindu parents. My body is the outcome of their union. But the soul that has entered into my body and makes me move about, think and talk all through these years, does not belong to them. The child is marked by the community to which the parents belong and in that way I am also called a Hindu. As the child grows up the sense of reasoning is at work. The grown-up child now looks at the various beliefs and faiths founded by many messiahs who visited this planet as incarnations at various periods and places and starts to analyse and finally finds one among them more agreeable and apt to her / his life and thus continues to practise and follow the same. Only now s/he should be called by the religious name to which s/he has handed over her / his soul. It could be the right way of naming the person after her/his choice of religions.

## **What Christ means to me**

In the present world of haste and hectic engagements humans are running a mad race in the pursuit of achieving mundane pleasures. It would be to the best of one's liking to have a safe and smooth path to be followed with all convenience to complete one's journey of life peacefully and finally attain the very purpose and goal of one's life. I am looking around me at the various doctrines. Just as the mother's milk, the first elixir the child tasted in its life, which is the safest and most palatable diet, Jesus has given me his mild and meaningful message for the humankind. Jesus Christ, as I see is the finest and complete personification of love. All the religions preach love. Jesus is the root of the great tree of love that would not only provide safe

shelter to live in and have fruits of love to satiate the hunger of the soul. To follow Jesus one need not do anything but to love all his creations. When the spirit of love germinates in a soul, it will very rapidly grow and transform the whole human to get united with all her / his brethren. No other way is so simple than this path of love preached by the beloved Son of God, Jesus. You need not exert too much and spend a lot of money and time to love your neighbour first and the country next and finally love the whole world. Anyone who has the growing feelings of love becomes the beloved child of Christ whether one adores Him or not, whether one belongs to Christianity or not. I perceive in this way: the kingdom of Christ is the greatest one reaching far and wide, every nook and corner not only of places but also of the minds of persons living in this universe.

Christianity as a religion and its great masters who carried on this message of Christ in India have done noble and laudable divine services to the people of India by reaching them at all hours of need and despair. For centuries the relentless service rendered by the servants of Christ in the field of education and medical care is widely known and a totally accepted fact. In the present ways of serving the humanity in India, let me humbly appeal not to allow the caste bias which I have chanced to observe with great regret amongst my Christian friends. Even after accepting Christ and embracing His message of love, the stigma of caste and creed should not be allowed to cast their evil shadows to darken the brightness of His love.

Once a person accepts Christ, there cannot be any such discrimination that awfully lifts its ugly head nowadays in this country. Let us all resolve to declare that we belong to the one and only great Son who preached love and nothing but love and who embraced all the creation with no discrimination whatsoever.

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## **Christ the Messenger of Love**

**S.M. Pandya**

In 1967, when I joined St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, my knowledge of Christianity was almost nil. My childhood and schooling period passed in North Gujarat where there is no population of Christians. During college period in Ahmedabad also, I had no Christian friends. Only in 1959 when I represented my H.K. Arts College in Rev. Father Gomes Sanskrit Trophy competition, I saw fathers for the first time. For a pretty long time, I took Christianity as a strange religion and looked at it with doubts as it was the religion of the British. It was also my impression that Christian schools and colleges were meant for the affluent classes and poor or middle class students had no place in them. I should confess that my knowledge about that religion was quite superficial.

When I joined St. Xavier's College as lecturer in Sanskrit, for the first time I knew about the worldwide religious order, the Society of Jesus and the multipurpose activities of missionaries in different countries. The fact that from the view point of its followers, Christianity is the biggest religion and the Bible has maximum circulation in the world, was also known to me much later. In the lecture rooms I always used to see the symbol of cross and image of Jesus Christ. Gradually I started to gather information on this religion from my friends.. I had somewhere read about Jesus Christ's sacrifice but when I heard about that in detail, I had unforgettable experience of that great tragedy in the history of humankind. Then onwards my attitude towards Christianity totally changed.

My friend and colleague, Raymond Parmar, Professor of Gujarati, used to brief me about the principles of Christianity, Christian saints, mythology and the sacred book Bible. That helped me a lot in understanding Christianity better. Rev. Father Cueli was busy at that time in translating the Bible into Gujarati with the help of local scholars. Prof. Parmar was also assisting him. He used to ask me for appropriate Sanskrit of certain words used in rituals or certain phrases. When the work was over, he presented to me the copy of the translated work and I read some of the chapters with great interest. During the tenure of my service, I have had several opportunities to attend the Holy Mass in the chapel. I was continuously impressed by the readings of the selected passages by the priests, quite appropriate to the occasions and particularly by the Bhajans sung by the Choir. I am a great admirer of the systematic manner of Christian prayers and the involvement of attendants in it.

I am a Hindu Brahmin belonging to Yajurveda. One of the verses of the Yajurveda is world famous, viz.... *Ano bhadra Kratavo Yantu Viswata*: "May auspicious thoughts come to us from all sides." Respecting this principle of my Veda, I have always tried sincerely and honestly to understand whatever is best in other faiths. In my view two great ideals, namely "Love" and "forgiveness" are very well cherished by Christianity in theory as well as in practice. Lord Jesus Christ practised them perfectly throughout his life. Much more is written about the power of love in the world literature. Love is a tonic. I am always delighted at the sight of Christian priests and nuns distributing that tonic sincerely. Lord Jesus is love and forgiveness incarnate. The way he forgave even his enemies and his great revival is the rare example in the history of humankind. Whenever I see the image of that great Son of God, my mind bows down to him who suffered for the welfare of humankind.

Lord Jesus is the classical example of *Sthita Prajna, Jnani, Bhakta* described in our *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*! In the twelfth Chapter of it we find:

*Sama Satran mitre Catatha manapamanayo  
Sitoshna Sukhadukheshu Sama Samga Vivarjita*



*Adveshta Sarvabhutanam maitra Karuna eva cha  
nirmamo nirahamkara Sama Sukhadukha Kshami*

“He who is equal to the enemy as well as to the friend, (responding equal) either in respect or in insult, (acting) same during cold, hot, happiness or unhappiness and without any personal attachment, is (a Man with the ultimate knowledge).” 12-18.

“He, who is never hostile to any one who is friend of all and compassionate, not partial to anybody and without pride, remains equal during suffering as well as happiness and of forgiving nature is (a Man with the ultimate knowledge).” 12.13

It is a matter of great pleasure and wonder to me that Lord Jesus was a rare combination of all the three ideal persons viz: *Sthita Prajna, Jnani, Bhakta* described by Srimad Bhagavad Gita in the Chapters two, twelve and fourteen respectively. Lord Jesus by the great sacrifice of his life propounded the principle “Happiness even in sufferings”. Hindu religion has also upheld the same principle. In the third section of the great Indian epic Mahabharata there is a very interesting dialogue between Draupadi, the heroine of the epic and Satyabhama, the wife of Lord Krishna. During her short stay with Draupadi, Satyabhama noticed that Draupadi was very dear to her husband. She asked about the ways of her dealing with the husband. In reply to the question, she narrated her sufferings and hardships of the forest life and added:

*Sukham Sukhenegha na jathu labhyam*

*Dukhena Sadvi tabhathe Sukhathi*

“Happiness cannot be attained through happiness but through sufferings only”. This is the universal message to the humankind by Christianity as well as Hindu religion.

In the last section of Mahabharata, while concluding the epic, the great sage Maharshi Vyasa has stated:

*Harshastana Sahasrani bhayastana Satani Cha*

*Divase Divase muddama Visanthi na Panditam*

*(Swarharohana Pervam)*

"There are a thousand sources of pleasure and a hundred of fear which trouble the fool day in and day out but not the scholar." Jesus was such a rare scholar or saint; he proved that by bearing the cross of sufferings on his shoulders. If the symbol of the cross can be explained extensively, I doubt whether anyone can criticize Christianity, especially when the inseparable connection between the Cross and the Resurrection is pointed out.

Missionaries have always impressed me by their love for learning and their dedication and sincerity in serving humanity. It is a very shining aspect of Christianity. I happily recollect some scholars like Rev. Fr. Estreller, a scholar in Vaidic Studies, Rev. Fr. Bulke, authority on Ramakatha, Rev. Brother Ishanand for his wonderful comparative study "Krishna and Christ" and Rev. Father Noel Sheth for his extensive studies in Krsnacharita. Rev. Father Valles proved himself to be a great Gujarati writer by imbibing the Gujarati language and literature. Mother Teresa has opened up new avenues to selfless service with great missionary spirit. These are inspiring souls for all of us.

After the experience of more than thirty years, working in a Christian college, I can say without hesitation that most of the Fathers, mothers and nuns are generous, broadminded and tolerant. They have imbibed in their lives the principles of love, forgiveness and compassion. In Yajurveda it is said: *Mitrasya Chakshusha Sameeksha mahe ajurveda 36:18* "Let us look at each other with the eye of a friend." I am happy to note that the missionaries try to evaluate others with friendly eyes. I have seen my superiors calm, cold and extremely tolerant even in the crucial moments. It is my conviction that there is something very significant in the training of the Fathers. I am particularly happy to note that missionary management are very careful and selfcontrolled in exercising the minority rights granted to them by the Indian constitution. Of course sometimes they are quite calculative and ruthless but not inhuman.

I have seen some of the Brothers and Fathers working generously for the poor without any reservation. Late Rev. Brother Hill and Rev. Brother Lobo were working for the poor and they had generated tremendous respect and love in the hearts of non-Christians in the

city. Brothers like Bandhu Ishanand worry for the poor day and night and is always unhappy to see communal disharmony in our country.

In spite of all these good aspects of Christianity, it should be stated that a number of Hindus look at the missionaries with doubts and misgivings. The issue of conversion often mars the atmosphere of harmony. Even the great Mahatma Gandhi who was the lover of Christianity had to say this, "Every religion is as precious to me as my own Hinduism. No thought of conversion is permissible to me at all. Should some persons think of changing their religious label (converting themselves), I cannot hinder their freedom of action, but I will be sorry to see them act thus". *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, (p. 38-39).

It is also not fair that the religion may give up its basic identity for any temporary gain or specific motive. Indianization of Christianity is no better a trick to convert Adivasis and to make them feel that the new religion is familiar. It is quite suggestive that some of the Christians do not agree with that kind of means.

It is very sad that at present in Gujarat Hinduism is overshadowed by Pseudo Hindutva or Cowbelt Hinduism. Attacks on Christian churches or institutions can never be justified from any point of view but at the same time Christians and Missionaries will have to be very careful with regard to the issue of conversion. Generally in Gujarat relation between Christians and Hindus has remained cordial and harmonious but recently some incidents in the Ahwa District are alarming and Missionaries will have to think very seriously on their ways and means for the purpose of conversion. Service to humankind is the glorious aspect of Christianity and that spirit should always be upheld. Nobody should allow it to be marred by unnecessary controversies. Hindu religion is known for its all encompassing approach and real Hindu will never endorse the aggressive approach of fundamentalist Hindus.

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# **The Compassionate Jesus**

**Amrita Kaul**

Jesus Christ is perhaps the one figure towards whom the whole humanity is attracted and I am no exception. He is without doubt the most appealing figure in our entire civilization even if we do not give him the halo of God. For even me a Hindu, who very rarely go to Church, Christ has remained my greatest teacher. The most appealing words which I think are the essence of Christianity and for me the essence of divinity.

‘Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you’

Or quite simply ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’. Has ever a concept so lovely and civilizing been given to humankind? This thought itself brings sublimity to our life which otherwise seems to be caught up in the realm of competition where there is struggle for survival and only the fittest are supposed to survive. Christianity with its preaching of love has moderated the natural aggressiveness of the human and inculcated gentleness.

Surely as far as I see it Christ’s contribution has been towards conceiving all humanity as one, loving it, suffering for it without stint. This ever encompassing love, the supreme sacrifice, the capability to suffer and die for the animal domain (of survival of the fittest) and brings him to almost the status of God.

I see Christ as the Son of God or God-man endowed with such high faculties that he would have been revered even if he had not been involved in any religious movement. Christ very simply signifies the unity of the divine and the human spirit. For anyone who has read the New Testament Jesus appears most extraordinarily the one who



changed the face of humanity. He exercises an irresistible power, a beauty, an idealism which is difficult to overcome. He is the beautiful incarnation of God, the Son of God or God-man, whatever one may choose to call him. His beauty is eternal for he is definitely the embodiment of morality, a just man who, even when he was persecuted, said to his enemy: "You are the son of the same heavenly Father". If this message could be understood by all of us perhaps humanity would no longer be divided on the basis of religion. We would realize that different religions are different paths of reaching that same, one God, one supreme creator.

Christ then appears to be a God-man containing a human personality and yet endowed with divine spirit. While he lived he performed miracles and yet he was dependent on nature for finally he was subject to suffering and to death. To get out of this suffering one has to take the road towards oneself, follow the inward path (self-realization as also propounded by Hinduism) and finally return to God.

For a Hindu identifying with Jesus is very easy for the legends of Krishna are so very similar to those of Christ. Krishna's first days were threatened by massacre exactly like that of Herod, his infancy was amongst shepherds. He also performed miracles like Christ.

For me personally in my moments of despair or joy the one God or incarnation which stands as symbol of love and becomes easy to identify with is Jesus Christ. It is Christ nailed to the Cross who becomes a symbol of strength and a source of inspiration from whom I can draw an inner strength to do what is gracious, what is correct and what is beautiful since all his life he symbolized all these values.

Another special appeal he has for me is due to His parables and simple stories which make it easy for any lay man or woman to follow him and understand the concepts of morality. He paved the path for a simple, honest and upright living and showed its beauty by his example of such a life even with its suffering and pain. Each parable of Jesus is heart-warming. For example he compares God to a good shepherd who looks for the lost sheep and gets it into the fold. The idea of a loving father taking utmost care of each one of his children is fascinating. How secure and loved the one who catches the essence

of his parable feels of the child to whom this parable is read out. Is this not what faith in God should achieve: reaching towards our ultimate potential through confidence in the eternal love of God our Father.

Another thing which appeals to me is that there is no undue mention of Karma (as in Hinduism). One is solely responsible for oneself and one's actions. One is not conditioned by one's circumstances but is rather constantly deciding how best to live in any situation in which God has placed one. Yet it is here that I find Christianity a little confusing. As I understand it, God's grace is given to those who respond in faith and yet human faith itself is made possible only because God elects those who shall respond. So in a way only those who are elected shall be saved! This seems to me a little unfair. Does that mean that if one is good that is no guarantee that one will be the recipient of heavenly grace? Or simply that one is free to lead one's life as one wishes but God in his knowledge already knows how one will use one's freedom.

However, the Christian thought that a simple act of faith can bring about forgiveness is an excellent one and gives hope even to a sinner.

In India Christianity has a special appeal since our masses are poor, living in sub-human conditions. Jesus had a special love for the poor, the down-trodden, the sinners. The promise of salvation through faith compensates for their sufferings and the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven brings beauty to their existence. How much more appealing is this doctrine to a poor Indian than the doctrine of Karma.

Jesus Christ did not believe in capitalism. He wanted that everybody should be provided for. I think this is what gives Christianity a special appeal in a country like ours. His message uplifts many a human soul; Mass and the singing together is a very uplifting experience. Therefore belief is natural - out of hunger for self preservation.

Yet I feel like adding that the Church's concern has not been as all-embracing as Christ's affection that accepts all and rejects none.

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## Christ: the Divine Touch of Love

N.R. Menon

I worship Jesus Christ for three reasons. One, He suffered for no sins of his. This gives me lot of courage when I suffer too, for no fault of mine. Secondly, Jesus was humble and patient. This makes my life-attitude humble and I am ready to wait, for the dawn of happiness and fulfilment. And thirdly, Jesus *Cared*. This has tremendously motivated me to care, to share, to be concerned about all others, especially because Jesus teaches me that the very same 'self' is present in everyone. Sacrifice is a must for spiritual progress.

When I am alone, I know that I am not alone. Jesus too was alone at many times. Yet, essentially, He was not alone. I feel His presence when I am alone and at the magic touch of His invisible Love, my fearsome worries melt into divine solitude. Yes, He means a lot to me.

I should say that the priests and nuns should smile at people more and mingle with all, in all divine freedom. Afterall, the Religious-Persons ought to be more 'free'. They are not facing the burdens of householders. They need not be afraid of being friends of the 'common man'! They need not think twice to resist 'injustice' wherever it is felt. They should not remain aloof, in the midst of encircling social tragedies where Jesus in the poor is crucified every moment. The church should become more Indian. It should openly side with the depressed and the oppressed. And Priesthood shouldn't be just a career. If it be, then God will fail.

Christ is important for India, as he is for the whole universe. He

teaches every one not to shy away from responsibilities. He teaches us to live for others, while living for us.

I personally know many priests and nuns who work silently, with absolute dedication, for the good of others. This is indeed the Miracle of Jesus, that many a soul sacrifices for other souls.

Finally a word about conversion. Conversion by choice is not a wrong thing but this choice shouldn't be by any sort of undue influence. There is a trend presently among certain practitioners of christianity to defy other religions, especially the Hindu deities and religious practices. I have come across a lot of publications in Malayalam which highlight this very undesirable trend.

The enlightened Christian Leadership should come out openly against such mis-directed ill-guided moves by certain sections. Let us believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humans. Let our words match up to our deeds.

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## Christ Belongs to All

Kadvabhai Parmar

Today the whole world is plunged into great distress, by the countries of followers of Christianity, though it is a historical fact that no one can find an upholder of non-violence like Jesus. He has himself practised the ideals of non-violence to its apex by forgiving those who pegged him on the Cross. His message of Love and non-violence was best experimented on a collective mass scale by Mahatma Gandhi. Alas! both these Prophets of non-violence were killed by religious fanatics. Ultimately the humanity suffered most. Well, these 'god-savers' are keeping the Bible, Quran or Gita in their pockets and hold the sword / gun in their hands in the name of their Gods. They do the religious fight or cry jihad or the dharma yudth but in fact they are heavily disturbing peace. Since the last 20 centuries our continuous production of weapons, and nuclear bombs has never led humanity to peace and secular harmony. Peace is impossible with non peaceful means. We have once again to go back to the message of love and non-violence of Lord Christ through the practical solution given by Mahatma Gandhi.

In India and in the World there are several historical evidences for acceptance of the message of love and non-violence by great persons on individual basis; they even have at the risk of great suffering pardoned enemies. Among them Christ stands at the top. The same was tested by Gandhiji on collective mass to lead the non-violent fight for freedom of India. He made love and non-violence not only as super religion (*Ahimsa Parmo Dharma*) but the best religion in all circumstances.

This has proved to us Hindus that Christ is not alien, he is our

own, of our family. Such a person cannot be confined to any single religion. He belongs to the whole human kind. He has led us on the unique path of Truth, Love and Non-violence.

That one creator God (Brahma) is dwelling in all creatures is well taught in Hinduism, that all human beings are equal is preached in Islam and that all should love the neighbour and the enemy is advocated by Christianity. Certainly this is the best belief to bring about secular harmony in life with peace and happiness. When a good christian accepts Bram-Vidya with his salvation works and a good Hindu accepts salvation and equality with his services to Brahma, there cannot be any difference in their life and practice.

As a Hindu, born in Gujarat Gandhi had the humble belief that we all have good regards for all religions including Christianity and Islam. We have great pleasure to accept them in good faith. Well, by accepting them we are not going to lose our belief as Hindus. On the contrary our good religious feelings become wider! We must be honest in our dealings. This will encourage and illuminate our life as Hindus. Our philosophy of Brahma-Vidya is enriched and salvation will be more acceptable and appreciable in our day to day life.

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# Jesus Proclaimed Universal Brotherhood

Achinta J. Yajnik

Although Experience as such is beyond language and rationalisations, I hereby attempt to narrate my phenomenological experience about how I, as a Hindu seeker, view Christ, christianity and christians. By phenomenological experience what I mean is an experience in which an attempt is made to see the subjective reality with the maximum possible objectivity and bracketing of all types of conditionings. I am neither a scholar of Hinduism or Christianity nor do I have a wide range of experience. So whatever is presented here is based on limited intelligence, limited knowledge and limited experience. Therefore from the very beginning I feel humble about my statements and request the reader to view them only as the impressions and opinions of a young mind liable to challenge and correction.

According to Hindu Vedic philosophy, Brahman or God is one and only one, and absolutely unique (*ekmevadvitiyam brahman*). Lord Svaminarayana also says that Narayana (God) is Narayana alone. None can have a relation of identity with Him.

According to Hindu principle of incarnation of God (*Avataravada*), Lord incarnates on this earth from time to time for the establishment of Dharma and destruction of Adharma (*dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge-Gita*). To use Christian terminology, we can say that to bring the "Kingdom of God" on this earth, God incarnates on this earth. According to Avataravada, God Himself incarnates either fully or partially through His messengers or saints known as "Vibhooti" in Hindu philosophy. As Lord Krishna, in the Vibhooti Yoga of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, says "Anything which is great is because of My presence there" (10:41). In this philosophic background of Hinduism,

I as humble Hindu seeker, see Jesus, who is a Son of God, as one of the Vibhooti incarnations of God. Every incarnation of God had and has a specific purpose. Likewise, incarnation of Jesus also had a purpose. God incarnated on this earth in the Vibhooti form of Jesus to teach us the message of Love, Selfless Service and Universal Brotherhood. In other words, Jesus incarnated to materialise and spread the Hindu concept of World Family (*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*).

Any single value, be of love, truth, service or any other value-when it reaches perfection in one's behaviour and when it penetrates the whole being fully, the person becomes totally integrated and fully self-actualised. Vibhootis are normally such self-actualised persons. With Gandhiji I found total dedication and worship of the value of Truth; while with Jesus, I found the full actualisation of the value of Love. I love Jesus because of this quality of love only. The softness of the being, kindness of heart, the delicacy in every gross and subtle behaviour of Jesus impresses and inspires me a lot to imbibe this value of love.

Secondly, whenever I read the Bible, I find the same fundamental principles of spirituality which I have learnt as a Hindu seeker. Love, compassion for the poor (*daridranarayana*), fulfilment of human life only through the commitment to the Divine, preparedness to give up everything to reach the Divine etc. are the common spiritual principles between Hinduism and Christianity, and I believe that as far as living spirituality is concerned, the fundamental principles must be the same in all religions. Metaphysical differences do appear but they are, in my opinion, only secondary. Metaphysical beliefs are more private things of experience. One can do *Sadhana* with his or her own metaphysical assumptions, but when it comes to the operational, behavioural and interaction level, the same values of love, forgiveness, generosity, selflessness etc. are reflected in every truly religious person. *Shivamahimastotra* of Hinduism says that according to different tastes and aptitudes, different paths exist but all lead to God, just as all rivers finally reach only ocean. Another saying in Hinduism is that *sarva namaskara keshavam prati gachhti*, i.e., all Divine reverence reach to God only. Lord Buddha also, therefore, advocated 'metaphysical silence' and emphasised living spirituality. In short, while reading the Bible, metaphysical differences do not affect me much. The sermon on the mount and Christ's other teachings about law, anger, adultery,



love for enemies, charity, prayer, possessions etc. are absolutely consistent, perfectly same and totally acceptable to me as a Hindu seeker.

I like to read the Bible also because of its stories. I love to read the Bible just as I love to read the Upanishads, Hitopadesh, Panchtantra and Jatak stories; because the style of the Bible runs through parables, metaphors and stories. The metaphors of salt and light, the parable of lost sheep, prodigal son and story of woman at the well etc. are really very much lovely, strengthening and inspiring.

Besides, I have been born and brought up in the religious tradition of Shri Svaminarayana which has been termed by Raymond Williams as the 'New Face of Hinduism'. I have found Svaminarayanian teachings, to be very near the message of the Bible. Not only teachings of fundamental spirituality are the same but at certain places even the words and myths are identical. When Shri Svaminarayana incarnated on this earth, Ramananda Swami, who initiated Him, was preparing the soil for Lord's work. Ramananda Swami used to say, "I am not God. I am only His trumpeter. God is coming." The same is found in the Bible in the teachings of John the Baptist.

Similarly the Bible says, what use if you win the wide world, but lose your soul? Almost the same words are used in Svaminarayana tradition. Gunatitananda Swami, one of the choicest saints of Lord Svaminarayana said, "Millions of worldly achievements are made, but if salvation is left behind, then what is achieved?"

The temptations given to Jesus remind me of the temptations given to Nachiketa in Katha Upanishad. Christ's teaching about the law reminds me of the Hindu Law of Rta and it is to this law only that the famous Hindu dictum 'This is the Eternal Law.' (*Esha Dharmo Sanatana*) applies. In Jesus' commandment, 'Do not commit murder, anyone who does will be brought to trial' or in Jesus' teaching about judgement, I find the echoes of Hindu Law of Karma. Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Lord Svaminarayana says, 'If bad people, because of their spoiled intelligence, give you bad names and even bite you, forgive all their misdeeds and pray for their welfare. "Do unto others what you would like them to do unto you" goes parallel with Hindu teaching that" I give the gist of the millions of scriptures in half a verse; what is disturbing

to one's own self, may not be practiced towards others. In Jesus' saying, 'whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.' Reminds me of the Upanishadic saying: As the Great Masters say this path is as difficult as it is to walk on the edge of a sword.' The love, concern and priority for the poor and the deprived are common with Jesus and Shri Svaminarayana. There is no exaggeration in saying that Lord Svaminarayana incarnated as a high caste Brahmin for the liberation of the lowest of the low. Among His choicest devotees living with the highest standards of morality and spirituality were the masons, carpenters, farmers and other down-trodden people. Only because of this same intense concern for the rejected, found in Jesus and Shri Svaminarayana that Reginald Heber, Lord Bishop of Calcutta, who met Lord Svaminarayana in 1825, has written, "His (Svaminarayana's) morality was said to be far better than any which would be learnt from Shastras. He preached a great degree of purity, forbidding his disciples so much as not to look at any woman whom they passed. He condemned theft and bloodshed and those villages and districts which received him form being among the best and most orderly in the provinces. Nor was all this, insomuch as he was said to have considerable approaches to the truth, that I would not but hope he might be an appointed instrument to prepare the way for the Gospel."

One of my Christian friends always gives me Upper Room, the narrations and experiences described there also strengthen my faith and spirituality.

In short, only a few examples and catchy citations above show how deep similarities are observed in the spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Christianity. A detailed study and research should be done along this line to bring out religious harmony; because, as Socrates said, 'Virtue is knowledge', it is only the knowledge which brings good conduct and removes the ultimate causes of tension generated due to nescience. Science with its underlying Cartesian dualism has trained our mind to divide, to cut things into pieces, to analyse, to differentiate. This mentality ultimately leads us to war, discord and disharmony. But now at the dawn of 21st century, we need to learn to synthesise, harmonise and create a holistic vision.

Following Jesus' commandment, 'Do not judge others, and God

will not judge you', I prefer to bracket my opinions and impressions about Christians and their activity in India. Max Muller translated all our scriptures and Monier Williams gave a Dictionary but as it is heard, even such noblest task was also done to make conversions easier. Christians must come out of their obsession with conversion. In every religion, there are true and psuedo religious people. I respect true messengers of Christ who really work for the poor without any ulterior motives. Others with their highly deceptive, sugar-coated vested interests doing all the socalled social work with the sole motive of conversion are not at all true Christians and I believe, Jesus won't be pleased with them. Similarly, from the psychological point-of-view, I understand the Hindu fundamentalist reaction towards other religions because of their perceived threat to their own identity due to over protection given to minorities by the politicians to fill their votebanks. Although psychologically I understand this reaction, rationally I do not approve at all of such Hindu fundamentalist activities. I strongly condemn, as a Hindu seeker, the burning of the Bible and the attacks on churches. We, because of our strength in number should not frighten and oppress the minorities. The minorities should feel that it is only in Hindustan that we can live with maximum freedom and security. In short, VHP and RSS should definitely take some steps, but very concrete and constructive steps, to preserve Hindu identity and culture.

Secondly, conversion should be taken by a true Hindu as a chance for introspection and self-analysis. The Hindu religious leaders should think together very very urgently about the Varnashrama system and do something very concrete so that our own brothers and sisters born in a fourth Varna may not depart from Hinduism and within the Hindu system they should be able to live with full dignity and social acceptance. It is my observation that they very much like to belong to Hinduism because their cultural heritage, their deity, social customs and the dispositions in their collective unconscious are Hindu only. We should remind them that there have been Rishis of the vedic hymns who belonged to fourth varna. Medieval injustice done to them deserves to be condemned and Hindu revival along this line is the demand of the time and it can be one of the concrete solutions. The Christians should also, rather than taking the disadvantage of the situation, help

the harmony within Hinduism, if they are really true in their claim of selfless service. In spite of my sincere attempt to avoid any judgement; while discussing this sensitive issue, some direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious judgement might have occurred, for which I apologise.

It is very important for all of us to remember that it is one thing to talk about truly secular spirit or *sarvadharmasamabhava*, but it is very very difficult to live thoroughly in ones thought, speech and deed the real spirit of Sarvadharmasamabhava. Everyone would love and revere his or her own religion in which he or she has been born and brought up. If the really spiritual and essentially universal message of one's own religion is not grasped and imbibed fully through intense Sadhana, there are all the chances that the very love and commitment to one's own religion becomes misdirected, turns into narrow, self-centered vision and fanaticism which ultimately harms not only the individual and the society but also his or her own religion too, be it Hinduism or Christianity. Generosity, all-inclusiveness broadened outlook are not to be expected only from Hindus. All the religions need to develop this universal outlook, because, applying the Darwinian principle of the Survival of the Fittest in evolution, we can legitimately say that only those religions would survive which are more universal, generous and allowing differences in the worship according to the differences in human nature. Narcissistic vision in religion is suicidal. Therefore, we all should reach to the more fundamental and universal essence of our own religion. We should be always most self-critical and most appreciative of others. As the Bible says, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but pay no attention to the log in your own eye? So the kind Son of God hates such a person by calling him a hypocrite. This is the Golden Rule of Growth at individual as well as at collective level. We should also remember that there are no separate Gods for Hindus and Christians in 'Heaven'. Transcendentally there is only one God, again as the Bible says, People will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13-22) and that the One and Only One Almighty is pleased only with the practice of this Golden Rule. We should refrain from the attack and the defence of religion. Not by erasing other's line but by drawing our own line longer only, we can prove ourselves. Every person who claims to be religious should



always remember the following words of Swami Vivekananda, uttered in the last address of Chicago World Parliament of Religions on the 27th September, 1893. As he says,

“Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come through the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of others, to him I say, ‘brother, yours is an impossible hope.’ Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become earth, or air, or water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become Hindu or Buddhist nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his/her individuality and grow according to his/her own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: “Help and not Fight”, “Assimilation and not Destruction”, “Harmony and Peace and not Dissension”.

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## My First Encounter With Jesus

Dipankar Basu

When my grandfather died, I was only five. Ten years later, while exploring through a chest of drawers that contained his cherished possessions, I came upon a hard bound black cover book titled *Of the Imitation of Christ*. The pages had become brittle and yellow. Inscriptions on the cover page showed that my grandfather had received the book from his father; profuse underlining with blue pencil indicated that he had studied it with great concern and devotion.

I instinctively felt drawn to the book and touched it to my forehead. I have read about the book - I knew that Swami Vivekananda used to carry a copy of it while he travelled through the length and breadth of India; I knew that he started to translate it in Bengali and wrote that this book is no less than the "Bhakti Yoga" of the Bhagavad Gita. But nevertheless, it was the first time I saw the book and read it. I was 15 years old reading in class IX of St. Lawrence's High School, Calcutta. That was my first encounter with Christ; I was gripped by HIM.

Now, almost 30 years later, I feel a bit funny about this first meeting. St. Lawrence's is a Jesuit school, and I had been quite close to the Jesuit fathers. Yet Jesus came to me through my family heritage and not through any of them. We were told about God, but never about the person of Jesus. May be this was better. Jesus came to me as a family guru, as one who had been loved and worshipped by my ancestors - and not as someone who was forced on me.

I read, reflected, meditated on the lines of the book and at this stage two of the Jesuit fathers helped me a lot. I wanted to share this book with others, including classmates and other members of the

L.T.S. However, I thought it would be prudent to write my name on it before lending it. I was awe – struck just before doing so! writing one's name would imply possessing it and would it not go against the very spirit of the book? At the same time, the book (i.e., the particular copy of it) had become so dear to me that I could not bear the thought of losing it. I solved the dilemma by writing on the front page "Please return it to Dipankar Basu after you have completed reading it". The book had been lent to many and it was always returned (who says, miracles do not happen nowadays anymore!).

But what does Jesus mean to me now? I am eager to share with you but I am afraid that the article will be too long then. If God so wills, I will share with you someday the Hindu view of Jesus as an incarnation. I also look forward to share with you the full text of the sanskrit mantras (along with its translation in English) with which Jesus is worshipped by a number of Hindu monastic orders on Christmas eve and day.

Permit me now to conclude this article with the English translation of the *Pushpanjali Mantra* of Christ Jesus.

*"May the Word of God that assumed human form lead me to God, protect and nourish me. I bow down to Jesus, my Beautiful Saviour".*

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## **Christianity among Santals - My Experience**

**Boro Baski**

It is my privilege that while studying in a Christian Mission School, I learned a little about Christianity, though I myself am not a Christian. I remember attending religious class at the Mission School, and Mass was compulsory for all Christian and non-Christian students. The stories of Christ, along with very attractive pictures, seemed interesting to me. We especially loved the stories of Jesus performing miracles, like walking on the water or the story from the Old Testament in which Jonah stayed in a fish's belly for three days. All these stories made no impact on me beyond their quality as stories. Later, when I came in touch with some Christians, I learnt more about Christ. I found that the real Christian way of life was appealing to me. And anybody who could receive the real spirit of Christ, would find a certain inspiration from within. His teachings bear historical truth. In this complex society the mere explanation of his teachings cannot satisfy us. For example the Gospel says,

'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life..... cannot go to heaven'. If we take these words literally, they appear unacceptable to me; But I understand that even without accepting Christ's religion as our own, we are able to follow Christ. Christ's relevance will continue as long as there are human beings in this Universe. But according to the need of the time Christ's teachings should be reinterpreted. The more time and civilisation will advance, the harder it will be to understand Christ or his teaching.



When I was in a Christian Mission School, I used to see the catechists get together every week-end. All of them were Santals and most of them were first generation Christians. Their academic qualification was not more than School Final. Some of them even had less than that. I doubt if they could present Christian teaching to laymen in the village effectively.

Before I discuss how Christ is being presented to the Santals, I want to say something about Santals themselves. As other tribes, we, the Santals, are a highly structured community. In the village we have our own administrative system. There are five office-bearers who look after the religious, judiciary and social aspects of the village community. I won't say that whatever we practise is healthy for us, but, I believe we do have something good, which we can share with the rest of the world. Let me give some examples: Our strong community feelings at birth, and death and during marriage festivals the entire village participate. The Santal's sense of joy is wonderful; men and women dance throughout the night. We have no religious fanaticism and fundamentalism either, which have now risen in almost all the major religions.

So, to present Christ in such a structured community is not very easy. Moreover, you have to go to the headman of the village, when you preach Christ, and then there is very little hope to succeed. So, the only method every missionary takes to penetrate a village is through Santal Christians and through the "back door" of the village. That means, he establishes direct contact with one particular family, avoiding the village administration. Eventually, when the village community comes to know that it has been infiltrated, it tries desperately to bring the other back to the fold. If they fail, they use their last weapon and that is to attack the Catechist or the newly converted Christians. This way divisions and quarrels start in the village. Let me take the example of our village, Ghoshaldanga. We are 46 families. Very recently, 6 families have shown an interest in Christianity. Fine, that is their personal matter and everybody has his or her constitutional right to take any religion they wish. But the problem arose when they refused to contribute money and participate in any village rituals. The reason

they give, is: "I want to change my god. I become more and more unhappy with my Santal god". Sanathan Murmu, father of two sons, told me, "Moreover, our children will get education and will speak English". This is the way the villages are being convinced to convert to Christianity. I hardly see that any message of Christ finds root here.

One of my Santal Christian friends told me what happened at her brother's marriage. The priest of their parish insisted that the bride and bridegroom follow Santal marriage rituals (including dress) instead of using western rituals (as in most Santal Christian weddings). Expectedly, an immediate refusal came from that Santal Christian family. Their argument was: We are Christians and not Santals like many others. If we use traditional Santal rituals, then what is the difference between us-Christian Santals and them. I see a problem concerning the religious teachings here. Christian Santals are being convinced from the beginning that they are different from the non-Christian Santals. This gives them pride and a sense of superiority in their community. As one of my British friends said: Christian Santals are more attracted by external manifestaions of western culture, than by Christianity itself.

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